

a better place to live. I am honored to represent one of the largest populations of ethnic Armenians outside Armenia, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have visited their homeland.

As we move toward a new century, and look back on the successes of our past, I would ask my colleagues to join me in saluting the remarkable achievements in the Republic of Armenia. To the Armenian people we send our respect and admiration on the occasion of your nation's eighth anniversary of independence.

BAPTIST CHURCH TARGETED BY
AZERBAIJAN AUTHORITIES

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I rise today to highlight a disturbing incident involving governmental harassment of religious believers in Azerbaijan. We have received reports of religious liberty violations perpetrated by governmental authorities. As a participating State of the OSCE, Azerbaijan has committed to insuring the freedom of individuals to profess and practice their religion. These recent governmental actions are a clear violation of Azerbaijan's OSCE commitment to the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

On September 5th, government officials in Baku forced their way into a legally-registered church, Baku Baptist Church, and arrested sixty members of the religious group. The pastors of the church as well as a dozen foreigners were among those arrested and interrogated. The arrested Azeri religious believers were detained and asked to sign a statement affirming that they had attended an "illegal meeting" and promising not to attend the religious meetings in the future. Ultimately, two leaders of the church were sentenced to 15 days in prison on charges relating to resisting police. Likewise, then other foreign members of the religious group were charged with "engaging in religious propaganda" and "propagating against the Muslim faith," in violation of an Azeri law that forbids such activity. On September 8th, all ten foreigners were deported and more deportations are likely.

These events are alarming, Mr. Speaker. While there had been reports of governmental harassment in the past, especially of unregistered religious minority groups, these current events are especially problematic because the target of these actions was a legally registered religious group.

Mr. Speaker, these actions are in direct violation to Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments, including section 16 of the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document, which explicitly delineates the wide scope of activities protected, including the right to establish and maintain places of worship and granting them status under law to both profess and practice their faith. In the 1990 Copenhagen Concluding Document Article 9.1, Azerbaijan has reaffirmed "that everyone will have the right to freedom of expres-

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

sion, including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

The actions by Azerbaijani officials clearly violate these commitments. I truly hope that these government actions are merely an aberration and will be dealt with accordingly and are not the signal of even more repression of religious believers in Azerbaijan.

I would like to commend to my colleagues the work of our Embassy in Baku on religious liberty. Embassy personnel have taken this recent incident very seriously and have followed the situation from the start. I urge those of my colleagues who interact with Azerbaijani Government officials to raise religious liberty issues in their discussions, stressing the essential role that religious liberty—and indeed human rights in general—play in maintaining a free, stable, and democratic civil society.

IN RECOGNITION OF 1999 LAWSUIT
ABUSE AWARENESS WEEK IN
THE STATE OF OHIO

HON. PAUL E. GILLMOR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. GILLMOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to call attention to an important designation this week in the state of Ohio. The week of Sunday, September 19 through Saturday, September 25, 1999, has been officially designated by Ohio Governor Bob Taft as lawsuit Abuse Awareness Week.

The 1999 Lawsuit Abuse Awareness Week campaign attempts to better educate citizens throughout the state of Ohio about the ongoing concerns of the legal problems in our judicial system. During this campaign, the Ohio Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse (OCALA) has undertaken a public awareness campaign to voice the concerns about lawsuit abuse and draw attention to the impact it has on the state of Ohio. Citizens from across the state have assisted with the campaign to help OCALA spread its message.

Mr. Speaker, the overwhelming rise in lawsuit abuse is not a concern specific to the state of Ohio. Certainly, these problems carry both state and national implications, which affect all Americans. In recent years, our society has become more prone to litigation. In fact, some statistics show the number of lawsuits filed each year approaching 300,000. The sheer number of these lawsuits requires millions of dollars in expenses and thousands of hours from employees. These figures demonstrate that lawsuit abuse is a heavy burden that interferes with our continued economic growth.

As lawsuits continue to climb in number and scope, the impact on our standard of living is evident. Frivolous lawsuits result in higher operating costs for businesses, the withdrawal of products from the marketplace, and the potential decline in growth and overall expansion. Simple economics shows us that these costs are inevitably passed along to consumers and workers in the form of higher prices, lost opportunities, and fewer jobs.

Mr. Speaker, lawsuit abuse is a serious issue facing the United States. As such, it is important for groups like OCALA to be recognized for their efforts in curtailing this abuse. Dedication to change, like that shown by OCALA and other groups, will further the cause to end lawsuit abuse and bring about overall legal reform. I would urge my colleagues to stand and join me in recognizing the week of Sunday, September 19 through Saturday, September 25, 1999, as "Ohio Lawsuit Abuse Awareness Week."

HONORING HILMAR MOORE

HON. TOM DeLAY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Mr. DELAY. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to honor a man whose dedication and commitment to his community should not go unnoticed. Today, September 22, 1999, marks the 50th anniversary of Hilmar Moore's continuous service as the mayor of Richmond, TX.

The mayor's term is a unique one in Texas and the Nation's history. Mayor Hilmar Moore was appointed to serve an unexpired term for Richmond, TX, on September 22, 1949. Since then he has unselfishly served for the advancement of the community. Mayor Moore has deep-seeded Texas roots. He is descended from several of Stephen F. Austin's original colonists who settled Texas. In fact, Mayor Moore is a life member of the Sons of the Republic of Texas. His family's strong commitment to community has lasted generations and many have served in State and local governments.

From 1970 to the present, the mayor has been and continues to be, a leader in the livestock community. He has served on the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association as second vice president, first vice president, and president from 1974–76. He has served on the Beef Industry Council of Meat Board as vice chairman from 1979–81 and as chairman from 1981–83. In 1983–84, Mayor Moore served as treasurer of the National Livestock and Meat Board and in 1984–85 as chairman-elect. Also, in 1985, he was named Trustee Emeritus of the Gulf Coast Conservation Association. Mayor Moore has received numerous awards and recognitions from the National Livestock and Meat Board Association, Texas Brahman Breeders Association, and the Golden Spur Award. Presently, along with his mayoral duties Hilmar Moore is the director of the King Ranch.

I wish to extend to Mayor Hilmar Moore my heartfelt congratulations and I know my colleagues here in the U.S. House of Representatives do so as well. It will be a pleasure to continue working with him for the improvement of the city of Richmond and the Fort Bend community.